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Report Charges War Setback

Associated Press

Hamlet security and enemy defections in South Vietnam hit new lows while Communist infiltration and South Vietnamese army desertions rose to record highs in March, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee says in an analysis of secret Defense Department statistics.

The document, dated May 13, said the percentage of hamlets secured was lower in March than any time in the past two years.

The period followed the January-February Communist Tet offensive and preceded President Johnson's March 31 peace talk offer.

Figures Not Included

Carl Marcy, chief of staff for the Committee, prepared the report. He said he did not include figures on which it is based because they are classified.

Ambassador Robert W. Komer, in charge of the U.S. pacification effort in Vietnam, acknowledged in a March 28 interview that "we unquestion-

ably suffered a real setback" in the Tet offensive.

He said, however, that only about 200 of some 8500 hamlets with a degree of government control had reverted to Vietcong control.

A Komer report made public May 13 referred to the "painfully slow but apparently steady recovery of the pacification momentum" since March.

Report for Members

Several members of the Foreign Relations Committee, including Chairman J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.), have long criticized U.S. war policy. The report for members, initiated by Marcy, said:

"1. The percentage of population secured, according to reports of government of South Vietnam, was lower in March than at any time in 1968 or 1967.

Red Control Rises

"2. The percentage of hamlets secured, again according to reports of the government of South Vietnam, was lower in March than at any time in the past two years.

"3. According to the Hamlet Evaluation System, administered by the United States Mission in Saigon, the percentage of population in category A, B and C hamlets — the three most secure categories — was lower in February and March than at any time in 1967. The percentage of population in Viet Cong controlled hamlets was higher in March than at any time since June 1967.

"4. Again, according to the Hamlet Evaluation System, the percentage of hamlets in Categories A, B and C was lower in February and March than any time in the past two years. The percentage of hamlets controlled by the Viet Cong was the highest since July 1967.

"5. The infiltration rate was higher in March than at any time in the past.

Enemy Defectors Few

"6. The number of enemy political and military defectors under the "Open Arms" program was lower in March than at any time in the past and was about a quarter of the monthly average in 1967.

"7. The number of South Vietnamese Army desertions was higher in February — figures have not been made available for March — than at any time in 1968 or 1967, and the number was about 30 per cent higher than the monthly average in 1967.

"8. Although U.S. and South Vietnamese deaths in action were almost equal in March, U.S. losses continued to be higher proportionately because of the fact that the combined strength of the South Vietnamese Army, Marine Corps, Regional Forces and Popular Forces — that is, South Vietnamese strength on the ground — was about 50 per cent higher than the combined strength of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps strength on the ground.

"United States deaths in action in March were about twice the monthly average in 1967 and almost four times the South Vietnamese deaths in action in March were 50 per cent higher than the monthly average in 1967. Enemy deaths in action in March were 2½ times as high as the monthly average in 1967."